

Early Child Care and Education in Wyoming Building Capacity, Aiming for Quality

Marc Homer, Kids Count Coordinator

In our part of the world, success on the gridiron is one measure of community vitality. And so a lesson about priorities can be learned from a neighboring small town. Smith Center Kansas' high school team has won three consecutive state championships, won 51 games straight, and out-scored opponents 704-0 last season. Coach Roger Barta was quoted as saying, "None of this is really about football. We're going to get scored on eventually, and lose a game, and that doesn't mean anything. What I hope we're doing is sending kids into life who know that every day means something." He added, "What we do around here real well is raise kids."¹ Communities that focus on raising good kids will naturally celebrate their success on the playing field and more critically in life as well.

Wyoming families are challenged to find child care solutions in an economic climate that often demands that all available parents join the workforce. To improve the quality of life in Wyoming and enhance prospects for sustainable and diversified economic development, it is critical for children to have equal access to high quality early care and education.

Graph 1: Child care demand: 40,293 children age 0-12
(UW War Memorial stadium filled to capacity with 7,713 on the field)²

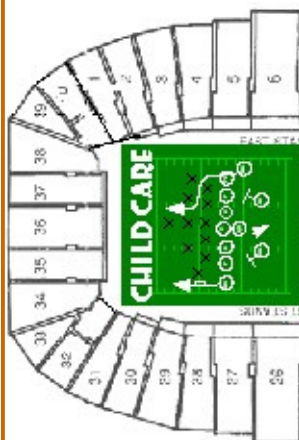


It is estimated that in Wyoming there are only 17,564 licensed child care slots for 40,293 kids (48% of all Wyoming Children age 0-12)³ that use or would potentially use child care services if it were available.

Welcome to Wyoming!

Imagine a family that's just moved to the Equality State. It seems like a good match because they pride themselves on their work ethic and Wyoming has the fourth lowest unemployment rate in the nation⁴. Landing new jobs, their combined household income is \$48,000, making them ineligible for government subsidies including health insurance and child care⁵. The sixth grader goes home unsupervised after school everyday because they can't spare the money to put him in child care. They find a licensed home provider to care for their four year old girl. She's healthy and safe though there's no focus on learning. There is no child care available for their 17 month infant and none in the foreseeable future. The family tries a patchwork of solutions but things just don't work out. Mom misses work one too many times and she gets fired. Rather than remain in the workforce, she stays home with the kids, lowering the annual income to \$26,000, making them eligible for most government subsidies. The parents are relieved that at least now they have health insurance for the kids. Mom's also glad her landlord (whom they pay \$9000 annually for a tiny two-bedroom apartment) has stopped chiding her for "being out working when she should be home taking care of the kids". **Mom and Dad are making plans to move the family to another state in the spring.**

Graph 2: Child care supply (0-12): 17,564 child care slots
(21.5 sections of UW War Memorial Stadium)⁵



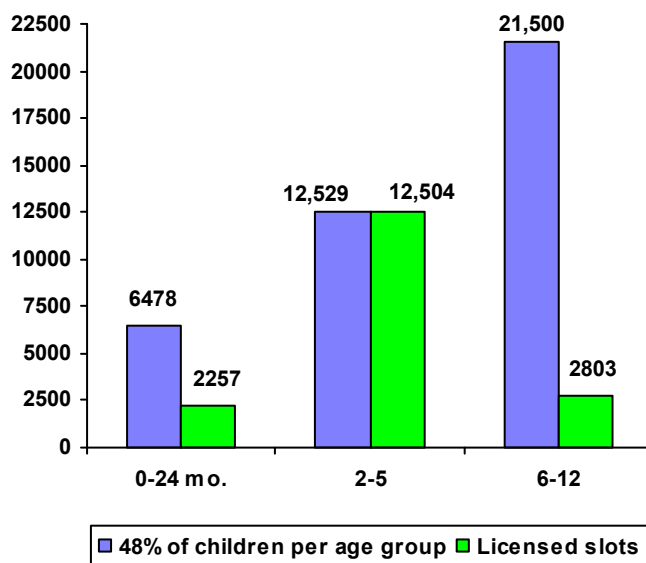
UW War Memorial Stadium

Can't get tickets to the big game? How does it feel to be a hard-working parent who can't find child care for her children and can't risk losing her job?

It is estimated that in Wyoming there are only 17,564 licensed child care slots for 40,293 kids (48% of all Wyoming Children age 0-12)⁶ that use or would potentially use child care services if available.

What if it was just a game and your children didn't have tickets?

Graph 3: WY Child care supply vs. demand: 2006
(48% of children per age group vs. licensed slots)⁷



The most critical licensed care shortage is for children ranging in age from 0 to 24 months (graph 3). In 2006, there were a maximum of 2257 licensed slots for as many as 6478 children competing for these slots. There is also a very short supply of child care slots for children age 6 to 12, with only 2803 slots for an estimated 21,500 children. There are 12,504 slots available for an estimated 12,529 children age 2 to 5 but parents must compete for quality care slots.⁸

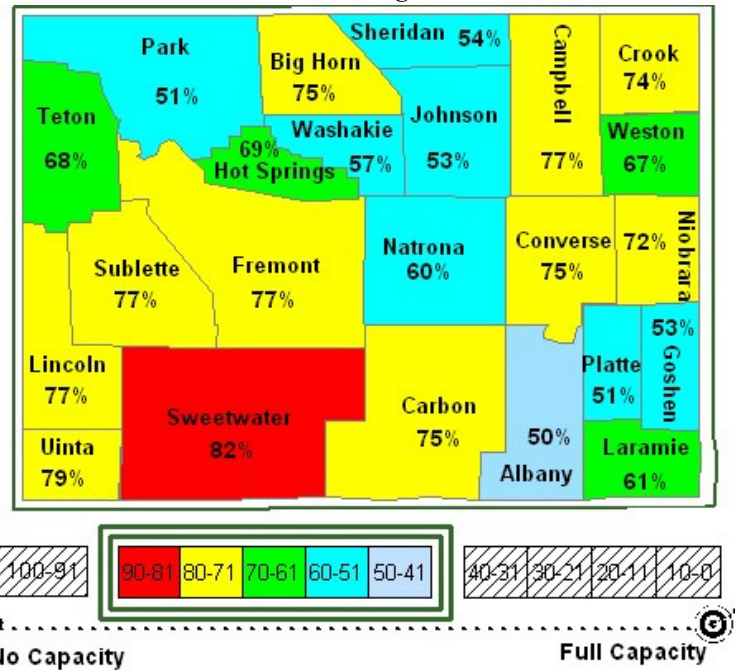
Child Care Shortage in Every Wyoming County

The most critical licensed care shortage is for children ranging in age from 0 to 24 months (Map 1). The shortfall ranges from 82% in Sweetwater, the county having the most difficulty meeting the demand for child care, to 50% (also critically short) in Albany (table 1). The availability of child care services is essential for developing healthy Wyoming communities. According to a 2006 Child Care Needs Assessment commissioned by the Department of Workforce Services, “For incoming workers with families, child care is increasingly regarded as an essential service by parents who desire to pursue and maintain full-time jobs. If the availability of child care constrains the potential opportunity to work and earn income, these family households will likely relocate to another community or state where child care is more readily available.”⁹ In Wyoming, parents are short on options and many children are not receiving the care that will prepare them to be productive members of society ready for life’s challenges.

If you’re at the right place at the right time, then you’re going to fall right into that child care slot—or you’re going to be at the opposite end of the spectrum and you’re going to call several names and not find anyone.

Kim Lamb, Child Care Finder

**Map 1: Percent child care shortfall by county:
based on 48% of children age 0-24 months: 2006¹⁰**



Kids Count Journal: Desperately seeking child care in a Wyoming town

How does it feel to be a parent seeking child care in a Wyoming town? Pick up the phone and start dialing child care providers—I called up every licensed home and center based child care business in Rock Springs—all 21 of them¹¹. Only three were listed in the phone book, right above Child Care Finder, an excellent resource for parents desperately seeking child care. My story was that I needed child care for a 20 month old girl and a 7 year old boy (about the same age as my own children). I was seeking half-day care for the toddler and after school care for the 7 year old. When pressed, I said I was considering moving to Rock Springs in a about a month.

The results of my informal survey certainly might discourage a family from relocating to Rock Springs. One business would take my 7 year old starting in June but only for the summer and only full time. The same business could care for my infant but like the older child, only if I wanted to leave her full-time or pay for full-time care. Of the 21 businesses, there was only one other that provided a ray of hope. The center director said they might be able to take the 7 year old—tentatively—and that they could take the infant, but again, only if I wanted to leave her full-time or pay for full-time. Six on the list were preschools that don’t take infants or school age kids—so they couldn’t help. All of the other providers were completely booked. One provider said, “I am full for the next several years.”

Child Care Challenges

- 1) Especially difficult finding care at prime times for those unaware that they should plan ahead. Start looking for fall care at the end of June, and summer care no later than March.
- 2) Lack of extended care, i.e. weekends, nights, early mornings, and holidays.
- 3) Reliable transportation is often a problem, especially for low income families.
- 4) A slot opens but the provider is too far from home, workplace, or siblings in care across town.
- 5) Providers may only take children full-time.
- 6) Siblings often have to be split-up between providers.
- 7) Back-up child care is very difficult to find when primary provider is sick or on vacation.
- 8) Wyoming families often don’t have extended family living nearby.
- 9) Parents of children with special needs, physical, behavioral, or developmental often have trouble finding suitable care. As a result, these kids are sometimes bounced from provider to provider, exacerbating their problems.
- 10) Lack of sustainable funding, facilities, and extended hours for after-school programs.

I can’t believe how many times people call and it’s prefaced by, ‘I’m desperate’ or some other similar adjective.

Jan Estebo, Child Care Finder

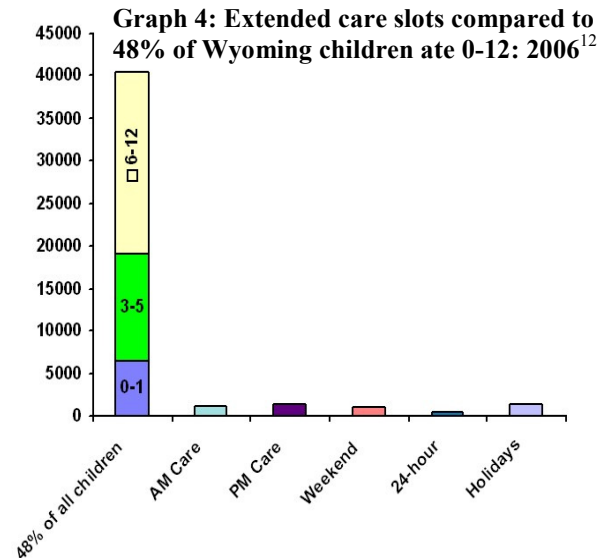
Shortage of Child Care During Extended Hours in Wyoming

Many parents must work multiple shifts or overtime just to make ends meet. They juggle schedules requiring them to work late nights, early mornings, weekends, and holidays. In Wyoming there are 1198 available AM slots, 1401 PM slots, 972 weekend slots, 364 24-hour slots, and 1405 slots available at the holidays. Many communities have no capacity or virtually no capacity to meet the need for extended hour care.

Anecdotally, some child care businesses that have tried to meet the need for extended care have found that it has not been fiscally feasible. The numbers show that in some of the larger counties such as Campbell, Natrona, and Laramie, it has been successful. Coming to terms with the challenge of ensuring that child care is available for these families will require a concerted effort between businesses that employ these parents, communities, families, child care providers, and government that operates on taxpayer revenue.

*Shift work, tough work
for the busy
convenience store clerk
Two feet that hurt,
going insane...
... 'round the clock pain
Work seven to three
Three to eleven
Eleven to seven*

George Strait



Aiming for Quality Early Care and Education Programs in Wyoming

Wyoming parents struggle to find child care solutions and they are particularly hard-pressed to find high quality care for their children. Some centers report waiting lists of 100 or more parents queued up to get their kids a much coveted slot. The 2006 Wyoming Child Care Quality study commissioned by the Department of Workforce Services found that a majority of Wyoming child care center classrooms (n=79) are performing very poorly in most of the six dimensions used to assess quality (table 1). The study results showed that family child care businesses (n=124), which were judged on somewhat different criteria than centers, were generally providing higher quality care than centers (table 2). However, 78% of family based businesses received a grade of D or F for Learning Environment¹³.

Table 1: Quality of center based child care classrooms in Wyoming by age group and letter grade¹⁴

	Safety & Health	Learning Environment	Scheduling	Curriculum	Interacting	Individualizing
Preschool (n=79)						
A-B ⁺	40%	1%	10%	10%	37%	13%
B-C	54%	6%	22%	9%	22%	19%
D-F	6%	92%	68%	81%	41%	65%
Toddlers (n=65)						
A-B ⁺	34%	0%	34%	8%	33%	11%
B-C	46%	7%	20%	13%	31%	8%
D-F	20%	93%	70%	79%	36%	80%
Infants (n=44)						
A-B ⁺	33%	2%	12%	19%	63%	19%
B-C	40%	9%	12%	5%	21%	5%
D-F	23%	88%	77%	77%	16%	77%

Table 2: Quality of family based child care businesses in Wyoming by letter grade¹⁵

	Safety	Health & Nutrition	Learning Environment	Interacting	Outdoor Environment	Professional Responsibility
A-B ⁺	42%	38%	5%	48%	31%	40%
B-C	49%	47%	17%	37%	42%	48%
D-F	9%	15%	78%	15%	27%	13%

References & Notes

¹Drape, J. (2007, November 9). A football power in a small Kansas town. *The New York Times*, from <http://www.nytimes.com/>

⁴Unemployment rates for March 2008. CNNMoney.com, from http://money.cnn.com/pf/features/lists/state_unemployment/

⁵Wyoming Children's Action Alliance. (2007). *Wyoming at a crossroads: 2007 kids count data book*. Laramie, WY: Marc Homer.

¹⁰Department of Workforce Services, State of Wyoming. (2006) *Wyoming workforce child care needs assessment*. Encampment, WY: Pedersen Planning Consultants.

^{14, 15, 16}Department of Workforce Services, State of Wyoming. (2006) *Wyoming child care quality: A comprehensive summary of child care findings*. Atlanta, GA: Annette Sibley, Ph.D., Quality Assist, Inc.

^{3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11}Child Care Finder, a program of Children and Nutrition Services, Inc., Teresa Williams.

^{2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11}Child Population: 2006 U.S. Bureau of the Census state population estimates.

^{2, 3, 6, 7, 8}Wyoming children age 6 in family based child care outside the home at least one time per week (2003): Child Trends analysis of data from the National Survey of Children's Health, Kids Count Data Center: www.aecf.org.

^{2, 3, 6, 7, 8}Wyoming children age 6 to 12 with all available parents in the labor force (2006): Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Supplementary Survey, 2001 Supplementary Survey, 2002 through 2006 American Community Survey.

¹²Licensed child care providers obtained from the Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, Jeff Ross.

^{14, 15, 16}Quality Care Data: For this issue brief, letter grades were assigned to the numerical categories in the following report with the consent of the author: Department of Workforce Services, State of Wyoming. (2006) *Wyoming child care quality: A comprehensive summary of child care findings*. Atlanta, GA: Annette Sibley, Ph.D., Quality Assist, Inc. Letter grades were assigned as follows: A/B⁺ = High (85%-100%), C/B = Moderate (70-84%), D/F = Low (0-69%)

^{2, 3, 6, 7, 8} Estimating the need for child care in Wyoming

- 1) Start with 85,908 Wyoming Children age 0-12: the 2006 U.S. Census Bureau estimate of Wyoming kids.
- 2) Subtract 25,529 (30%): In 2003, 30% of Wyoming children under age 6 attended family based child care outside the home at least once a week during the last month.
- 3) Multiply the remaining 60,379 by .67: In 2006, 67% of Wyoming children age 6-12 had all available parents in the labor force.
- 4) 40,293 Wyoming children age 0-12 make up the demand side of the equation. Calculated by age group, the demand for child care is 48% of all children 0-12.

Primary funding for the Wyoming KIDS COUNT project is provided by the **Annie E. Casey Foundation**, a private charitable organization dedicated to improving the lives of disadvantaged children and youth. By providing policy-makers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children. Production of this issue brief is the responsibility of the *Wyoming Children's Action Alliance* on the web at www.aecf.org.

The Wyoming Children's Action Alliance

is a statewide non-profit providing education, advocacy and leadership that will improve and promote the well being of Wyoming's children and families.

Marc Homer

KIDS COUNT Coordinator/Policy Analyst
419 South 5th Street, Suite 1
Laramie, Wyoming 82070
(307) 460-4454

Deanna Frey, Executive Director
3116 Old Faithful Road, Suite 100
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82001
(307) 635-2272 or (800) 400-3999

www.wykids.org

NEED DATA?

- 1) Visit www.aecf.org
- 2) Click [KIDS COUNT](#)
- 3) Click [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#) for state to state comparisons.
- 4) Click [CLIKS](#) for county and school district data.

WCAA POLICY BRIEF NO. 1

SPRING 2008



3116 Old Faithful Rd., Suite 100
Cheyenne, WY 82001